

BEFORE SERMON, AT SERMON, AND AFTER SERMON

NO. 1847

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 28, 1885,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be you doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”
James 1:21, 22.

BRETHREN, it is a good thing to be under the sound of the word of God. Even if the very lowest motive should induce persons to come to hear the gospel, it is nevertheless a good thing that they should come. We have heard of some who have even come to steal, and yet the word of God has stolen into their hearts. In many cases in olden times spies were sent to hear the Protestant divines who preached the gospel, and these took notes of all that was said, with a view to accuse them of false doctrine, that they might be punished, yet in several cases the spies themselves were converted. Such is the power of the gospel of Christ that it woos and wins even its greatest enemies. He that comes near to its fire, even with the intent to quench it, may find himself overcome by its heat.

Master Hugh Latimer, in his quaint manner, when exhorting people to go to church, tells of a woman who could not sleep for many nights, notwithstanding that drugs had been given to her, but she said that if they would take her to her parish church she could sleep there, for she had often enjoyed a quiet slumber under the sermon, and he goes the length of saying that if people even come to the sermon to sleep, it is better than not to come at all, for, he adds, in his fine old Saxon, “they may be caught napping.” It is even so. A sick man does well to live where there are physicians, for one day he may be healed. If men are in the heat of a battle they may be wounded, if they come where gospel arrows are shot they may fall under them. Plants that grow in the open are likely to be watered when the shower falls. We dare not say to any man who wills to enter the house of prayer, “You must not come, because your motive is gross and low.” No, you are welcome, anyhow. Who knows but that, being in the way, God may meet with you. Being where His truth is preached, you may hear it, and “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Yet it will strike you at once that though it is well to come to the hearing of the word in any case, yet it is better to come in a better way. We should endeavor to gather the most we can from the means of grace and not pluck at them at random. A farmer may feel that there will be sure to be some crop upon his land if he does but seed it, yet, if he is a wise man, he is not satisfied with a bare crop, but he fertilizes his land heavily, and tills it well, that it may bring forth a large return to him, for in these times the largest harvest is no more than he needs. So, my brethren, let us so use the holy ordinance of preaching that we may extract the largest possible amount of gold from the ore. Let us so come into the solemn assembly that we may hope to meet with God there, for this is the chief end of our gathering together, and let us so behave ourselves before the coming, and in the coming, and after the coming, to the sanctuary, that we may gain the greatest possible profit by our coming together. To hear the word of the Lord is often made of the Spirit of God to be life to dead souls, and the most eminent means of further quickening to those who are already alive unto God. Let us not lose a grain of the blessing through our own fault. The word of the Lord is precious in these days; let us not trifle with it.

This morning, I shall handle my text with the earnest design of teaching you how to hear. Oh, that the Spirit of God may graciously help me! First, let us note what to do *before the sermon*, “Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.” Secondly, let us learn how to behave *during the sermon*, “Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” And thirdly, here is the in-

struction for *after the sermon*, “Be you doers of the word, and not hearers only; deceiving your own selves.”

I. Let us consider the fit and proper preparation for listening to the gospel, or what is to be done BEFORE HEARING. It will strike every man who thinks about it, that there should be some preparation of the heart in coming to the worship of God, and to the hearing of the gospel. Consider who He is in whose name we gather, and surely we cannot rush together without thought. Consider whom we profess to worship, and we shall not hurry into His presence as men run to a fire. Moses, the man of God, was warned to put off his shoes from off his feet when God only revealed Himself in a bush, how should we prepare ourselves when we come to Him who reveals Himself in Christ Jesus His dear Son? There should be no stumbling into the place of worship half-asleep, no roaming there as if it were no more than going to a play house. We cannot expect to profit much if we bring with us a swarm of idle thoughts and a heart crammed with vanity. If we are full of folly, we may shut out the truth of God from our minds. We should make ready to receive what God is so ready to bestow. If he was condemned who came to the wedding feast not having on a wedding garment, what shall we say of those who habitually come into the festivals of our Lord and never think of being meet to be partakers of His royal dainties? What shall we say of those who defile the temple of God by never seeking to have their souls washed from the filthiness of their sin? Certainly there should be a serious preparation when a sinful creature draws near to the most holy God.

Brethren, when I think of our engagements throughout the week, who of us can feel fit, to come into the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High? I mean not into these tabernacles made with hands, but into the inner spiritual temple of communion with God. How shall we come unto God until we are washed? After traveling so miry a road as that which runs through this foul world, can we come unto God without shaking the dust from off our feet? Can we be busy with earthly cares all the six days of the week and be ready for the holy Sabbath without a thought? I think not. Even in the heathen temples before the solemn mysteries began the herald cried, “Far hence, you profane! Far hence, you profane!” and should not some herald cry to our wandering thoughts, “Far hence, vain thoughts, for God is here!” When the hour is come for drawing near unto the glorious Lord before whom angels veil their faces as they cry, “Holy, holy, holy,” it becomes us to be devout and humble, holy and earnest. Yes, brethren, if we were always occupied with divine worship, if we never knew thought or care except for His glory, if we were altogether dissociated from the entanglements and defilements of the world, I should not be so earnest to speak of preparation before hearing the word, but, alas, it is not so, we are men of unclean lips and we dwell among a people of unclean lips. We have not yet come into the holy country where everyone that salutes us is either saint or angel. We have not yet cut off all the Canaanites, but we still have need to watch against them daily. Because of the sin which dwells in us and around us, we have need to wash ourselves in the laver at the tabernacle door before we may come near unto the Most High.

There is a common consent among mankind that there should be some preparation for worship. I see the visible signs of it here today. Before the Sabbath dawned you began to prepare clean linen and brighter garments than those of common days. It is but an outward and common matter; still, within the shell there lies a kernel. Man puts off his ordinary weekday garments and puts on his best apparel for the Sabbath, because by instinct he feels that he should pay some reverence to his God. I fear this change of clothing full often degenerates into a wish to appear good before your fellow men, but the underlying meaning should be this, “I am going up this day to the worship of my God. I will not go, therefore, either in uncleanness of body or of apparel, but will put on the best raiment, that I may show respect to my God and to the assemblies of His house.” My counsel to you is, cleanse your hearts rather than your garments. Go before God in newness of spirit rather than in newness of clothing. If of old the prophet said, “Rend your heart, and not your garments,” so may I say today, “Put on the garments of righteousness and holiness by the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord, far rather than external garments, which do but adorn the flesh.” Yet, I say, even in that change of raiment there is an admission that there should be some kind of special preparation, when we go up to hear the word of God and to worship His holy name. God grant that we may not be forgetful of such fitting preparedness.

In making this preparation our text tells us that there are *some things to be laid aside*. What does it say? “Therefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.” Some things must be removed before the word of God can be received. And what are these things? The text mentions *all filthiness*.

Now sin of every kind is filthiness. It does not strike the most of men so, they call it pleasure, I have even known them to think it ornament. But in the judgment of the Spirit of God, who speaks here by His servant James, every sin is filthiness. In the sight of every renewed man all sin is filthiness and nothing better. Ever since the day when the Spirit of God took the scales from off his eyes, the godly man sees sin to be a *foul* thing, abominable in the sight of a holy God. Sin in the thoughts is filthiness of the thoughts, sin in words is filthiness of speech; sin in action is filthiness in life. Everywhere the transgression of the law is a foul and polluting thing, which neither God nor good men can bear. Now, brethren, in coming before God by the help of His Spirit every sin must be confessed, forsaken, and hated. By faith in the precious blood of Jesus it must be washed out, for we cannot come before God with acceptance while iniquity is indulged. We must remain apart from God till we are apart from filthiness. Filth, you know, is a *debasing* thing, meet only for beggars and thieves, and such is sin. Filth is *offensive* to all cleanly persons. We cannot bear close contact with a person who neglects the washing of his body or of his clothes, so as to become a living dunghill. However poor a man is he might be clean, and when he is not, he becomes a common nuisance to those who speak with him, or sit near him. If bodily filthiness is horrible to us, what must the filthiness of sin be to the pure and holy God! I cannot attempt to express the abomination of sin to God. He hates it with all His soul. If we are to be acceptable before God, there must be no keeping of favorite sins, no sparing of darling lusts; no providing for secret iniquities, our service will be filthiness before God if our hearts go after our sins. He says, "Be you clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." He would not have the vessels of His sanctuary touched with filthy fingers. Have we well considered this? Lay aside then all filthiness unless you wish to arouse the wrath of God. If we are offensive to God, all we do becomes offensive to Him. Remember how it is written, that "the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect." The Lord's acceptance is first, to the person, and then to the sacrifice—to Abel first, and to his offering afterwards. If God has no delight in a man's person, then has He no delight in his services. Think not, you unclean, that your hymns and praises, however sweetly they are sung, can be music in His ear! Think not that your forms of prayer can ever ascend like sweet perfume before Him; they are a stench to Him and an abomination, so long as you yourselves are not washed from your filthiness. The filthiness of sin is to be put aside if we would hear the word aright.

Moreover, sin is not only offensive, but it is *dangerous*. We have learned at last, I hope, though some are still ignorant of the fact, that filthiness means disease. Men begin to see that unless we are clean we cannot be healthy. He who harbors filth is making a hot-bed for the germs of disease, and thus he is the enemy of his family and of his neighborhood. The filthy man is a public poisoner, a suicide, and a murderer. Sin is the greatest conceivable danger to a man's own soul, it makes a man to be dead while he lives, yes, corrupt before he is dead. Sin is a mortal disease, and he that bears it about him is not far from hell, while he continues to love it, he can never enter heaven. Will you come before God and tread His courts with this leprosy upon your foreheads? Will you bring your infectious diseases into His temple? They must be laid apart. Oh, for grace to do this!

There are at least three sins that are intended here, and one is *covetousness*. Hence the desire of unholy gain is called filthy lucre, because it leads men to do dirty deeds which otherwise they would not think of. If the lust of wealth enters into the heart, it rots it to the core. The apostle cries, "Your gold and your silver are cankered," truly, the man becomes cankered and cankered too. Now when a man's heart is full of filth, when the desire to get gain and to get it anyhow, is strong on a man, he is in a very unfit condition to profit by hearing the gospel. You cannot get the gospel into him; a golden bolt fastens the door. He is somewhat in the condition of the sea captain I have heard of who went out after whales, and when he landed and heard the gospel preached, he said to the man of God, "Sir, it was of no use your preaching to me, for all the while I was thinking about where I should find a whale. There is no room for anything else in my mind but whales. I must have whales, and for the time I can think of nothing else but whales." So it must be with the man who is hot for gain; his farm and his merchandise are in his heart crowding out everything else. He who has a stall in Vanity Fair is in an unfit state to buy the truth, since his merchandise is vanity. A covetous man is an idolater, and cannot receive the gift of God till he has mastered his bosom sin. He is too foul to draw near to the Lord. God help him to escape from the idolatry of riches.

Then, with peculiar correctness, *lustfulness* may be spoken of as filthiness. I need not enlarge. Does not nature itself teach us that the indulgence of our animal passions, whatever form that indulgence may take, whether of drunkenness or lewdness, is a condition that makes a man unfit for the reception of the pure word of God? How should spotless purity come and dwell with that man whose life is brutish indulgence? How should the thrice holy Spirit come and dwell in that heart which is a den of unclean desires? Did the men of Sodom profit by the teaching of Lot? Shall a man come from the chamber of lust to the house of the Lord? No, brethren. We must lay apart all filthiness if we are to worship God in spirit and in truth.

But in the connection of my text the filthiness meant is especially *anger*. Read it, and you will see. "The wrath of man works not the righteousness of God; wherefore lay apart all filthiness." Some persons when they are angry will say things that never ought to be repeated, or even said for the first time. It was so no doubt in James's day even more than in our own, then angry men let fly horrible epithets and abominable insinuations which were indeed a superfluity of naughtiness. Now, the child of God is to subdue his anger, wrath, and malice. How can you accept the word of peace while you are at enmity with your brother? How can you hope to find forgiveness under the hearing of the word when you forgive not those who have trespassed against you? We would have you pray before you come into this house on the Sabbath morning or evening, and see to it that you come in the spirit of gentleness and meekness, only thus will you receive the engrafted word. The wrath of man is so filthy a thing, that it cannot work the righteousness of God nor is it likely that the righteousness of God will be worked in the heart that is hot like an oven with passion and malice. A revengeful, bitter, and malicious spirit is little likely to imbibe the sweet forgiving spirit of the gospel. God help us, then, to lay apart all filthiness, and especially all enmity.

But it is added, "*and superfluity of naughtiness.*" What does that mean? Any kind of naughtiness in a child of God is superfluous; iniquity ought not to be within him. "Superfluity of naughtiness," or the outpouring of evil, is unnecessary; it is an excrescence upon a child of God. The phrase here used differs not in meaning from the first epithet of the text; it gives another view of the same thing. You have seen a rose tree which, perhaps, was bearing very few roses, and you half wondered why. It was a good rose, and planted in good soil, but its flowers were scanty. You looked around it, and by and by you perceived that suckers were growing up from its roots. Now, these suckers come from the old, original briar, on which the rose had been grafted, and this rose had a superfluity of strength which it used in these suckers. These superfluities, or overflows, took away from the rose the life which it required, so that it could not produce the full amount of flowers which you expected from it. These superfluities of naughtiness that were coming up here and there were to the injury of the tree. Children of God, you cannot serve the Lord if you are giving your strength to any form of wrong, your naughtinesses are springing from the briar stock of your old nature, and the best thing to do is to cut off those suckers and stop them as much as possible, so that all the strength may return into the rose, and the lovely flowers of grace may abound. Oh, that God's people, when they come up here on the Sabbath day, may first have undergone that divine pruning which shall take away the superfluity of naughtiness, for there cannot be grafting without a measure of pruning. The gardener takes off from a certain part of the tree a shoot of the old stock, and then he inserts the graft. There must be a removal of superfluities in order that we may receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls. This is what is to be put away.

The garments spotted with the flesh and infected with disease are to be taken off and *laid apart*. We are to wear them no more, if we desire to profit by the word which we hear. We are not to lay *up* these to put them on again, but lay them *apart* among the offal of Tophet's fire, with the strong desire never to touch them again. To the fires we condemn these filthy things. What have we to do with filthiness, now that we have been begotten by the will of God to be the first fruits of His creatures? You who are the children of a holy God, what have you to do with naughtiness, or any such superfluity? God help you to shake off sin as Paul shook off the viper into the fire.

Why is this? Why is a man as he comes to hear the gospel to see to this? I take it because all these evil things *preoccupy* the mind. Whether it is covetousness, or lewdness, or anger, in addition to the pollution which these bring, they also possess the thoughts, so that they are not likely to be blessed while hearing the word. These are the rocks which prevent the seed from entering the mind, these, the birds which devour that which is sown, these the weeds which choke the upspringing shoots. Wherefore lay

these aside. If you bring your measures to this place filled to the brim with chaff, how can you expect to have them filled with wheat? If we come here with this filthiness about us, how can we expect that the pure and incorruptible word shall be sweet to us?

Moreover, sin *prejudices* against the gospel. A man says, "I did not enjoy the sermon." How can you? What have you been enjoying during the week? What flavor did last night leave in your mouth? "I cannot bear that man," says one, and if you could, it would be evidence that the man was not faithful. Can Ahab love Elijah? I remember seeing one get up and go out in hot indignation at what I had said, which happened to come personally home to him, though the man was a stranger to me. What I had said was the pure truth of God, and I could not be sorry that an ill-living man was indignant at it, since this was the only homage that such as he could pay to purity. Had he but known it, there was therein a manifestation to himself of what his nature was, and in what condition he was. Do you think Christ's servants desire to please those who will not please God? "Oh," said one to a Puritan divine, "my lord heard you this morning, and he is mightily offended at your remarks upon profane language, for my lord is given to drop an oath now and then in his ordinary speech." What said the Puritan divine? He answered, "Sir, if your lord offends my Lord, then your lord ought to be offended, and I cannot say less than I have said." If any men are offended with the gospel it is because they themselves offend God. It is almost invariably the case that when persons grow skeptical who once professed to be religious, and begin picking at this and that, there is a secret evil in their lives which they thus try to cover from their own consciences. The devil tempts them to rail at the ministry because the gospel presses hard upon their guilty consciences, and makes them feel uneasy in their sins. If you are to hear God's word with pleasure and profit to yourselves, you must "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness," for these things will prejudice you against the word of God, and render you incapable of that lively appreciation of it which is so needful to profiting thereby. God bless these words of mine, and may many of you who have come carelessly here at different times, henceforth seek to come with preparedness into the assembly of God's people.

II. Secondly, I will talk a little about DURING HEARING. How shall we act while listening to the Word? "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." The first thing, then, is *receive*. That word "receive" is a very instructive gospel word; it is the door through which God's grace enters to us. We are not saved by working, but by receiving, not by what we give to God, but by what God gives to us, and we receive from Him. In the hearing of the word there should be a receiving of it, not into the ear only, but into the understanding, into the heart, into the conscience, together with a laying-up of this good treasure in the memory and the affections. You must receive the word, or it cannot bless you. For, look, sirs, the word of God is a feast, but what comes of it if a man only looks at the banquet? Shall he not go away as empty as he came if he does not receive it? The preaching of the word is as a shower from heaven, but what happens to the soil if the raindrops fall, but none are absorbed into the soil? Of what avail is the shower if none is drunk in by the thirsty furrows? A medicine may have great healing power, but if it is not received, then it does not purge the inward parts of the body. There must be a receiving of any good thing before the goodness of it can be ours. I do love, when I read the Bible, or hear the word, to throw the doors of my soul wide open, yes, and to open all the windows of my heart. My soul cries, "Come in, most blessed Spirit; come in, divine Life. You shall not say there is no room for You in the inn, come, take possession of every chamber of this house of mine, and be Master of it from now on and forever." I pray you, my brethren, do not block up your souls against the incoming tide of the gospel. On the contrary, break down the dams, and let the river flow into you till you are filled with it. Receive the word. Many men are not profited by the word, because it does not penetrate them, but is like water flowing down a slab of marble. Truth must soak into the heart if it is to bless the heart. May the blessed Spirit give us a sweet receptiveness of the truth, for otherwise it is of no avail to hear it.

Then it is added, "receive *with meekness*." Many do not receive the gospel because they are not of a meek and teachable spirit. They come up to God's house, but the only seat they will occupy therein is the judgment seat. One would imagine them to be the god of God by their bold talk. Judge not the word of God, I charge you. You may judge *me* as you like, small matter shall that be to me, for we are not anxious as to men's judgment, but our judgment is with the living God. If the preacher truly declares the word of God, woe unto the man who sits in judgment upon it, this same word shall judge him at the last great day. We stand at the bar to be tried by God's word, and searched, and sifted, but woe unto us if,

rejecting every presence of meekness, we ascend the tribunal, and summon God Himself before us. The spirit of critics ill becomes sinners when they seek mercy of the Lord. His message must be received with teachableness of mind. When you know it is God's word, it may upbraid you, but you must receive it with meekness. It may startle you with its denunciations, but receive it with meekness. It may be there is something about the truth which at the first blush does not commend itself to your understanding, it is perhaps too high, too terrible, too deep, receive it with meekness. This is not the spirit of the present age, but it is the spirit which the living God requires of us. It is by receiving with meekness that we receive the truth in the power of it, and so it is able to save our souls. Except you are converted, and become as little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. The door of heaven is open to those who sit at Jesus' feet, and learn of Him. You are not His servant unless He is your Master. You cannot be said to be His disciple if you question His teaching, for in the questioning of Christ's teaching lies the rejection of His Person. To doubt Jesus is treason against the authority He claims over every human heart. Receive with meekness if you would be blessed with grace.

What is this which is to be received? "Receive with meekness *the engrafted word*." We are not bidden to receive with meekness men's words, for they are many, and there is little in them, but receive with meekness God's word, for it is one, and there is power in each word which proceeds out of His mouth. One word of God created the heavens and the earth, by the word of God the heavens still stand, one word of His shall before long shake not only earth but also heaven, therefore, hear with meekness that word; that word which testifies of sin, and of its sure punishment; that word which testifies of grace most large and free, and of an atonement provided by the Only Begotten Son of the Father, by which sin is put away in consistency with justice and holiness. Receive with meekness the word of the Lord in its entirety and unity. Reject no part of it, but receive the whole.

Any little particle of God's word, so far as we know it, is precious, and should be highly esteemed by us. The odds and ends, and corners, and fragments of the divine word are to be received by you and by me, and there is a lack of meekness in us if we begin to pick and choose, and cut and carve the divine word. Who are we that we should say, "This or that is not essential"? Who are you, O man, that you should decide what is essential or otherwise? He who gave the word did not write trifles. It is essential that you receive the word of the Lord as supreme and perfect, and it is essential that you are lost if you do willfully reject any portion of that which the Most High deigns to reveal to men. Receive with meekness the one, only, and indivisible word of the Lord.

It is called "*the engrafted word*." The Revised Version has "the implanted word," which is, perhaps, more literal than the Authorized translation, and it puts in the margin, "the inborn word," which gives another idea, and yet conveys a like sense. I will keep to our old and well-beloved version, and read it "engrafted word." When a graft is to be made, the first thing is to make a cut or gash. Nobody ever received the word of God into his heart to be engrafted there without being cut and wounded by the truth. It needs two wounds to make a graft, you wound the tree, and you wound that better tree which is to be grafted in. Is it not a blessed grafting when a wounded Savior comes into living contact with a wounded heart? When a bleeding heart is engrafted with a bleeding Savior? Engrafting implies that the heart is wounded and opened, and then the living word is laid in and received with meekness into the bleeding, wounded soul of the man. There is the gash, and there is the space opened by it. Here comes the graft, the gardener must establish a union between the tree and the graft. This new life, this new branch, is inserted into the old stem, and they are to be livingly joined together. At first they are bound together by the gardener, and clay is placed about the points of junction, but soon they begin to grow into one another, and only then is the grafting effectual. This new cutting grows into the old, and it begins to suck up the life of the old, and change it so that it makes new fruit. That branch, though it is in the grafted tree, is altogether of another sort. Now we want the word of God to be brought to us in a similar fashion, our heart must be cut and opened, and then the word must be laid into the gash till the two adhere, and then the heart begins to hold to the word, to believe in it, to hope in it, to love it, to grow to it, to grow into it, and to bear fruit accordingly. "Christ lives in me," said the apostle. Is not that a wonderful thought? The daily incarnation of Christ in the believer, or in other words, the new eternal life, living in us, and producing fruit after its own kind, while we live in it, and the fruit is our own. Christ is come in all the newness of His life, and is living in me. Oh, blessed grafting! "Receive with meekness the engrafted word."

Once more, you are to receive it by faith, for you are to regard the word as being *able*. Believe in the power of God's word; receive it as being fully able to save your souls from beginning to end. Two ways it does this, by putting away your sin as you accept the blood and righteousness of Christ, and by changing your nature as you accept the Lord Jesus to be your Master and your Lord, your life and your all. There is such potency in the word of God, that if it is received into the heart, it will effectually save the soul, it will not merely give you a hope of being saved, but really save you, save you now, save you through life, save you to all eternity. Oh, with what ears ought men to listen to a word which can save their souls! With what open mouths ought they to drink in this living water! How wisely might we wish to be like sponges, to suck it all up, or like Gideon's fleece, to be saturated with the dew of heaven! How we ought to wish to be like the plowed ground which is broken up and pulverized, so that every drop that falls may soak into it! Oh, that the new life that is come to us would put out the old life of the flesh, so that our life should no longer be after the old fashion, but in all newness of power! Let us rejoice to have the word engrafted in us.

This is how to behave at sermon. Oh, what need have we of the Holy Spirit to help us to hear the truth as well as to prepare us before we hear it!

III. Lastly, and very briefly, let us think of AFTER THE SERMON. "Be you doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

First, the command is *positive*—"Be you doers of the word." Oh, dear sirs, I come to this pulpit oftentimes and speak with you, but as I come here my heart is more and more burdened with this desire, that mine may not be an unprofitable ministry to you. I shall be useless to you unless you are doers of the word as well as hearers. Sirs, you have heard about repentance and the putting away of filthiness; repent, then, and let your filthiness be put away. May God the Holy Spirit lead you to do so—not to hear about it, but do it. You have heard us preach continually concerning faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you know all about believing, but have you believed? Sirs, have you believed? If not, to what avail is it for us to cry, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved"? We are to admonish you concerning all those blessed duties which spring out of that living faith which works by love, but it is nothing to hear about these virtues unless you possess them. Doing far surpasses hearing. I believe that with a very little knowledge and great doing of what we know, we may attain to a far higher degree of grace than with great knowledge and little doing of what we know. The man who knows how to keep shop makes no profit by his knowledge if he does not keep any shop. The doctor who knows how to cure the sick is not therefore a healer if he never has a patient. The man, who knows how to teach children but never teaches them, is not an instructor of youth. If a schoolmaster teaches the little he does know, he may be a better teacher than a great philosopher who keeps all his wisdom to himself. We value clouds by their rain, and men by their actual doings. The world is always looking to the church, not so much to hear her teachings as to see her doings. Few ask, "What is the doctrine taught at such a meeting house?" The ungodly world cries, "Forget the doctrine. What good is done there?" If the people who attend there are mean, false, and hypocritical, the world condemns the tree which yields such fruit. The bulk of men do not read the Bible, but they read you, and if they do not come to hear the minister preach the gospel, yet they say, "These people who hear him are no better than other people, and why should we trouble to go and listen to him?" The minister gets the blame which should rightly belong to those who are hearers but not doers of the word. Oh, may the Eternal Spirit work in us all to will and to do of His own good pleasure! There is nothing done by these Sundays, there is nothing done by these pulpits, there is nothing done by these pews, there is nothing done by these vast gatherings, unless our hearers are doers of the word. Practice is the harvest; the rest is but the plowing and the sowing.

Observe that the command is put *negatively*, the text says, "not hearers only." Those who are hearers only are wasters of the word. What poor creatures hearers are, for they have long ears and no hands! You have heard of him who one day was discoursing eloquently of philosophy to a crowd, who greatly applauded him. He thought he had made many disciples, but suddenly the market bell rang, and not a single person remained. Gain was to be made, and in their opinion no philosophy could be compared to personal profit. They were hearers till the market bell rang, and then, as they had been hearers only, they quit the hearing also. I fear it is so with our preaching, if the devil rings the bell for sin, for pleasure, for worldly amusement, or evil gain, our admirers quit us right speedily. The voice of the world drowns the voice of the word. Those who are only hearers, are hearers but for a time. Some of those now before me

are hearers only. We cannot mark your houses by putting a cross upon your doors, and writing on them, “Lord, have mercy upon us,” but if I did so, London would seem to be smitten with the plague. Oh that you would cease from this mocking of God, and ruining of yourselves! Remember, if any man will be lost, he will most surely be lost who heard the gospel and refused it. Write that word in great capital letters; if any soul will be lost emphatically, it is he who has been for years a hearer only, a hearer where thousands have believed unto eternal life. Over the cell of such a man write, “He knew his duty, but he did it not”; and that cell will be found to be built in the very center of Gehenna, it is the innermost prison of hell. Willful rejection of Christ ensures woeful rejection from Christ. Take heed, you that deny Him entrance now, lest He deny you entrance hereafter. Your hearts are hardening to an eternal impenitence necessitating eternal punishment—

*“How they deserve the deepest hell
That slight the joys above!
What chains of vengeance must they feel
Who break the bonds of love!”*

The text closes with this solemn word, “*deceiving your own selves.*” Whereupon says Bishop Brownrig, “To deceive is bad, to deceive yourselves is worse, to deceive yourselves about your souls is worst of all.” Alas! There are many in that sad condition. A syllogism may be bad, and yet it may look like logic, and such are the hopes which men fashion out of a bare hearing of the word. It is very easy, when you get well accustomed to the gospel, *au fait* at it, as they say, to be able to twist it so as to make it seem to favor you, though it condemns you. He who wills to be deceived can feign an acquittal out of a sentence of death. Many think it is all right with them, when it is all wrong with them. They always hear the gospel, how can they be castaways? They sit under a thoroughly evangelical divine, how can they be reprobates? They know what is what, they will not consent to hear false doctrine; they have a discriminating faculty, and will not abide unorthodox teaching. I am very glad they will not, but they seem to make a god of this discernment. Alas! It is a mere idol. Hundreds believe that because their minister is unquestionably sound in the faith, therefore they are sound also. As they have the good sense to hear *him*, surely they are first-rate people, and the Lord will overlook their faults. Oh, sirs, be not such fools! Do not deceive yourselves in that way, for there is no truth in this comforting conclusion. The better that which you hear, the guiltier are you if you do not practice it; and the plainer and more straight the gospel which is taught you, the more inexcusable are you if you do not receive it. When the gospel comes to you with a heavy knock at the door of your heart, the more terrible your crime if, you bolt and bar your door against it, or say, “When I have a more convenient season I will send for you.” God grant to each one of us that when we go home we may attend to the doing of the sermon. You know the old story, I am half ashamed to repeat it again, but it is so pat to the point. When Donald came out of church sooner than usual, Sandy said to him, “What? Donald, is the sermon all done?” “No,” said Donald, “it is all said, but it is not begun to be done yet.” Let my sermon be done in your chambers by prayer and in your lives by holiness. Let it be done all through the week by our each one seeking to put away all filthiness. Let us cling to the holy Christ, desiring to live His life, and breathe His Spirit. God grant it may be so with you all, for Jesus Christ’s sake.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JAMES 1.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—104, 652, 645.**

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